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April 27, 2007

TO : Guy Davenport,
Chief (acting), Sustainable Fisheries Division

FROM : Larry Beerkircher,
Pelagic Observer Program

SUBJECT: First quarter (2007) observer coverage summary.

The Pelagic Observer Program (POP) achieved a 9.8% coverage rate for the first quarter period of 2007 (January 1 to March 31). Selection letters were sent by certified mail service (return receipt) on December 15, 2006 to 20 vessel permit holders (owners and/or operators) for notification of observer coverage. The POP had the responsibility of the regular coverage requirement in the Northwest Atlantic, including the Gulf of Mexico. During this quarter the POP was not involved in any cooperative research projects as far as active deployments, however, on March 8, the POP was assigned responsibility for 100% observer coverage in the Gulf of Mexico from April 15 -June 15 (Quarter 2); significant amounts of staff time were devoted to preparation for this project during the last month of Quarter 1.

Of special note, there was one (1) vessel (Outlaw) selected for coverage for Quarter 4 (2006) which had fishing effort in both Quarter 4 (2006) and Quarter 1 (2007). Also, two (2) vessels (Queen Mary and Shady Lady) that were selected for Quarter 1 2007 had effort in both Quarter 1 and Quarter 2. For the purposes of this quarterly report, vessel hauls on or after January 1 until March 31, along with any incidental takes observed during this quarterly period (number of sets observed, days at-sea, animals caught) will be included in this summary. Overall during this quarter, observers spent 185 days at sea on 15 fishing vessels, which resulted in 115 hauls observed and a coverage rate of 9.8%. During the 17 observed trips (Table 1), set effort occurred in the geographical areas of the Gulf of Mexico (GOM), the Florida East Coast (FEC), the South Atlantic Bight (SAB), the Mid-Atlantic Bight(MAB), the Sargasso Sea (SAR), and the Caribbean (CAR).

Of the pelagic longline trips covered by observers under the 8% fleet requirement, a total of 95,624 hooks were fished. The total catch observed consisted of 3,138 fish representing 42 species of fish. The catch data was comprised of 1,003 swordfish,

174 bigeye tuna, 540 yellowfin tuna, 23 bluefin tuna, 80 albacore tuna, 31 other tuna species, 123 dolphin fish (mahi), 7 wahoo, 86 billfish species, 423 other finfish (escolar, lancetfish, etc.), 103 skates/rays, 0 small coastal sharks, 288 large coastal sharks, 346 pelagic sharks, and 14 unidentified fish species. During the quarter, observers also recorded incidental takes of protected species (Table 2) which included 6 seabirds (6-Greater Black-backed Gulls-dead), in addition to 7 sea turtles (1-leatherback-alive; 6-loggerheads-alive).

During the quarter, the POP did not place observers on 5 of the 20 vessels selected (25 %; Table 3), thus reducing the target coverage of the POP office by 23 sets. There were four selected vessels listed in Table 3 as not participating due to non-communication with the office, lack of a current safety decal, lack of bunk/life raft capacity, or a combination of those. These vessels reduced the POP's coverage opportunities by a minimum of 19 sets, which, if observed, would have resulted in our attaining an overall eleven percent (11+%) coverage. There was also one vessel, representing 4 potential sets, that remained communicative with the POP but lack of an available observer during one month and engine problems in two other months prevented coverage. It should be noted, however, that the figure of 25% of selected vessels not being covered represents an improvement from the past several years, where selected but not covered vessels made up 40-50% of the selection lists. Whether this improvement is the result of increased focus on observer compliance issues, change of fleet attitudes, or merely a random draw of cooperative vessels for selection (or perhaps a combination of these factors), remains unclear.

In closing, neither the Turtle Take Estimates (TTE) nor the Net Mortality Ratio (NMR) mentioned in the 2004 Biological Opinion (BO) are provided in this report as the POP does not have the staffing expertise to conduct these analyses. In addition, the POP recorded no sawfish catches during the quarter; this species is not likely to occur in the pelagic environment. Although turtle handling workshops are being scheduled at various ports, observers have also been instructed to share their expertise of using the turtle handling gear. Additionally, on August 5, 2004, the NOAA-Fisheries implemented the regulations for vessels to have the turtle handling and release gear on board. Shortly after that date, the POP observers were provided a turtle gear checklist form issued by the Miami PR and given instructions to review the gear on each boat, fill out the checklist forms, and submit the forms with their data at the completion of the trip. In keeping with the BO reporting requirements from the POP office, observers filled out the turtle handling and release gear forms on all of the fourth quarter covered vessels. Of the vessels selected and observed vessels in quarter 4, 93% of the vessels had the equipment needed for removing gear from turtles in the water (at least 3 of 4 items

aboard), and 100% had most of the equipment for removing gear if the turtle is boated (6 or more items aboard). Additionally, 73% of the selected vessels also had the turtle tether aboard, which is voluntary at this time. A PDF document of the observer turtle gear forms will be posted on a secure site of the POP website. Finally, the cumulative number of unique vessels observed since the effective date of the sea turtle conservation regulations (July, 2004), now stands at 82 vessels covered (Table 4).

Attachments:

Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4.

cc: The POP office files; Gregg Houghaboom, NOAA-Fisheries
SERO/OLE liaison.

Table 1: Regular coverage (8%) of the longline fleet. Number of vessels observed, areas of fishing activity, total hauls observed, and total days at-sea conducted by the SEFSC Miami Laboratory **POP** from January 1 to March 31, 2007.

Vessel Code	Vessel Name	Trip Number	Area	Total Hauls	Total Sea Days
1022773	EAGLE EYE II	J02057	CAR	3	5
1022773	EAGLE EYE II	J02058	SAR	10	19
1026595	WHITE WATER	S01084	FEC	10	13
1029384	OUR LADY OF LAVANG	P01126	GOM	10	15
1029594	QUEEN MARY	Q02063	GOM	4	6
1031845	DESTINY	D04037	FEC	7	14
			SAB	1	
1031845	DESTINY	D04038	FEC	1	7
			SAB	1	
1094947	VICTORIA	P01127	GOM	3	6
510728	MISS SUZANNE	T02027	MAB	10	16
596805	MARY ANN	J02060	SAB	7	9
600048	KIM THANH II	T02028	GOM	10	14
643282	OUTLAW ¹	T02026	FEC	2	4
			GOM	2	
902659	NIGHT STAR II	P01125	GOM	9	14
908223	SHADY LADY	B03003	SAB	5	7
918933	MISS LENA	S01085	GOM	6	12
923317	SEA QUEEN	W02004	GOM	8	15
937416	KIM THANH PN	J02059	GOM	6	9
TOTAL		17		115	185

¹Quarter 4, 2006 Vessel

Table 2: Percent coverage (by sets), the incidental take of Protected Resource species (turtles, mammals, seabirds), and hook effort summarized by geographical area for January 1 to March 31, 2007
(A=Alive, D=Dead, U= Unknown, LB=Leatherback, LH=Loggerhead, O=other)

AREA	TOTAL SETS OBSERVED	REQUIRED 8% COVERAGE	TURTLES		MAMMALS			BIRDS	
			A	D	A	D	U	A	D
			LB/LH/O						
GOM-2	58(9.3%)	50	0/ 0/0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FEC-3	20(17.8%)	9	1/ 2/0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SAB-4	14(12.4%)	9	0/3/0	0	0	0	0	0	0
MAB-5	10(6.7%)	12	0/ 0/0	0	0	0	0	0	6
CAR-1	3(100%)	0	0/1/0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SAR-8	10(5.7%)	14	0/ 0/0	0	0	0	0	0	0
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TOTAL	115(9.8%)	94	1/6/0	0	0	0	0	0	6

Hook effort Summary:

<u>Area</u>	<u>Hook effort</u>
GOM	49,104
FEC	18,261
SAB	12,507
MAB	5,960
CAR	2,132
SAR	7,660
TOTAL	95,624

Table 3: Listing of vessels that were not covered by Pelagic Observer Program (POP) during quarter 1, 2007 (January 1 to March 31). Short explanations provided. Vessel non-compliance of observer coverage may be based on more than one category of explanation. The following categories are provided: **(1)**No bunk available; **(2)**Observer presence exceeds the liferaft capacity; **(3)** Lack of current CFVSE decal; **(4)**No communication with observer office/staff; **(5)**Not fishing (involved in another fishery); **(6)**Not fishing (new owner, repair, sunk, no permits); and **(7)**other.

<u>Vessel Name</u>	<u>Doc #</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
BIGEYE	628300	Reason 6 and 7. Certified letter received. Owner contacted POP early in the Quarter, but no observer was available; observers were available during February and March but by then the vessel was out of the water for engine repairs. POP requested 4 sets for the quarter. Logbook submissions: Reported landings on 1/8, 1/14, and 1/25.
DELPHINUS	671174	Reason 1 and 2. Certified letter received. Owner faxed the POP office to indicate that his vessel rejects observer coverage based on 4 crew/4 bunks/4 man life raft. There were no further communications from the vessel. POP requested 5 sets for the quarter. Landings reported on 3/14.
DEQUEEN	942269	Reason 3. Certified letter received. Observer sent to vessel in February, safety decal was not current, vessel departed without observer. POP requested 5 sets for the quarter. Landings reported on 1/7, 2/3, and 3/5.

Table 3 (continued): Listing of vessels that were not covered by Pelagic Observer Program (POP) during quarter 1, 2007 (January 1 to March 31).

Short explanations provided. Vessel non-compliance of observer coverage may be based on more than one category of explanation. The following categories are provided: **(1)**No bunk available;**(2)**Observer presence exceeds the liferaft capacity;**(3)** Lack of current CFVSE decal; **(4)**No communication with observer office/staff; **(5)**Not fishing (involved in another fishery);**(6)**Not fishing (new owner, repair, sunk, no permits); and **(7)**other.

<u>Vessel Name</u>	<u>Doc #</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
JANICE ANN	646506	Reason 4 and 5. Certified letter received. Owner did not communicate with the POP, however, logbook information indicated the vessel was involved with buoy gear fishing during the quarter. POP requested 4 sets for the quarter. Vessel landings (by buoy gear) reported 2/9 and 2/12.
MASTER RAY	669893	Reason 4. Certified letter received. No communications received from owner/operator. POP requested 5 sets for the quarter. Landings reported on 1/8, 1/29, 2/12, 3/2, and 3/21.

Table 4: The POP coverage completed aboard the pelagic longline fleet by quarter and year since the publication of the 2004 Biological Opinion. The number of trips observed include vessels that are covered multiple times during a quarter. The number of unique vessels observed represents those vessels only covered once by an observer during a quarter and year.

Quarter	Year	No. of Vessels Selected	No. of Trips Observed	No. of Unique Vessels Observed
3	2004	44	29	29
4	2004	30	28	14
1	2005	34	26	12
2	2005	45	22	9
3	2005	41	19	7
4	2005	28	14	1
1	2006	31	20	4
2	2006	33	23	2
3	2006	39	22	2
4	2006	24	17	1
1	2007	20	17	1
Cumulative Totals			237	82
